

Setting Program Learning Outcomes: A Few Basics

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What are learning outcomes?
(or learning goals?)



Learning Outcomes Are...

“ ...goals that describe what students will be able to do as the result of a learning experience. More specifically, learning outcomes are the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of mind that students take with them from a learning experience.”

Suskie (2017), Chapter 4



What do you want students to know when they cross the stage at graduation?



What skills should they be able to demonstrate as you send them off to an employer? Or graduate school?

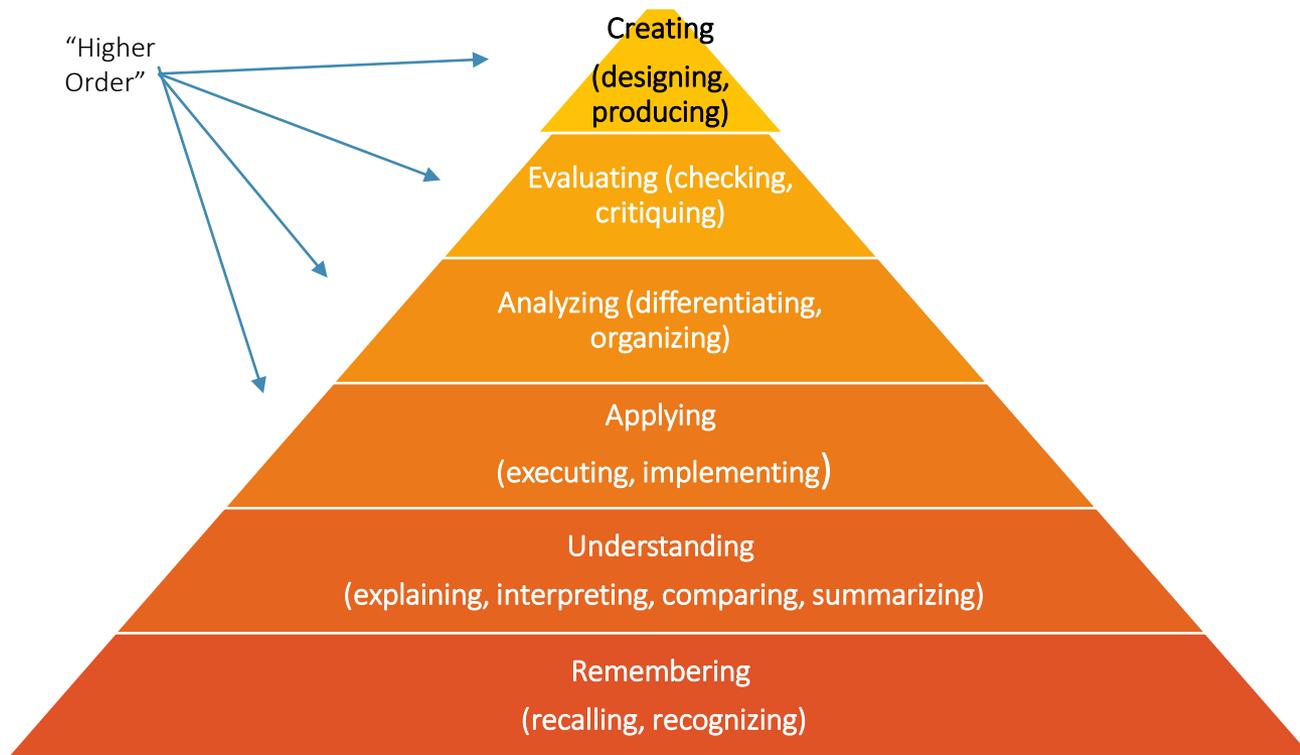
What values do you want to instill?

What knowledge will they have because they majored in this program?



One View:

Program Outcomes Focus on “Higher Order Learning” Six Levels of Thinking



Higher Order Levels of Thinking (Examples)*

Application: The capacity to use knowledge in a new context. Example: “Apply scientific or economic principles to everyday life.”

Analysis: The capacity to break a complex concept apart to understand its components.

Example: “Explain the impact of the Korean War on US-East Asian relations today.”

Evaluation: Making informed judgments about the merits of something.

Example: “Judge the effectiveness of the use of color in a work of art.”

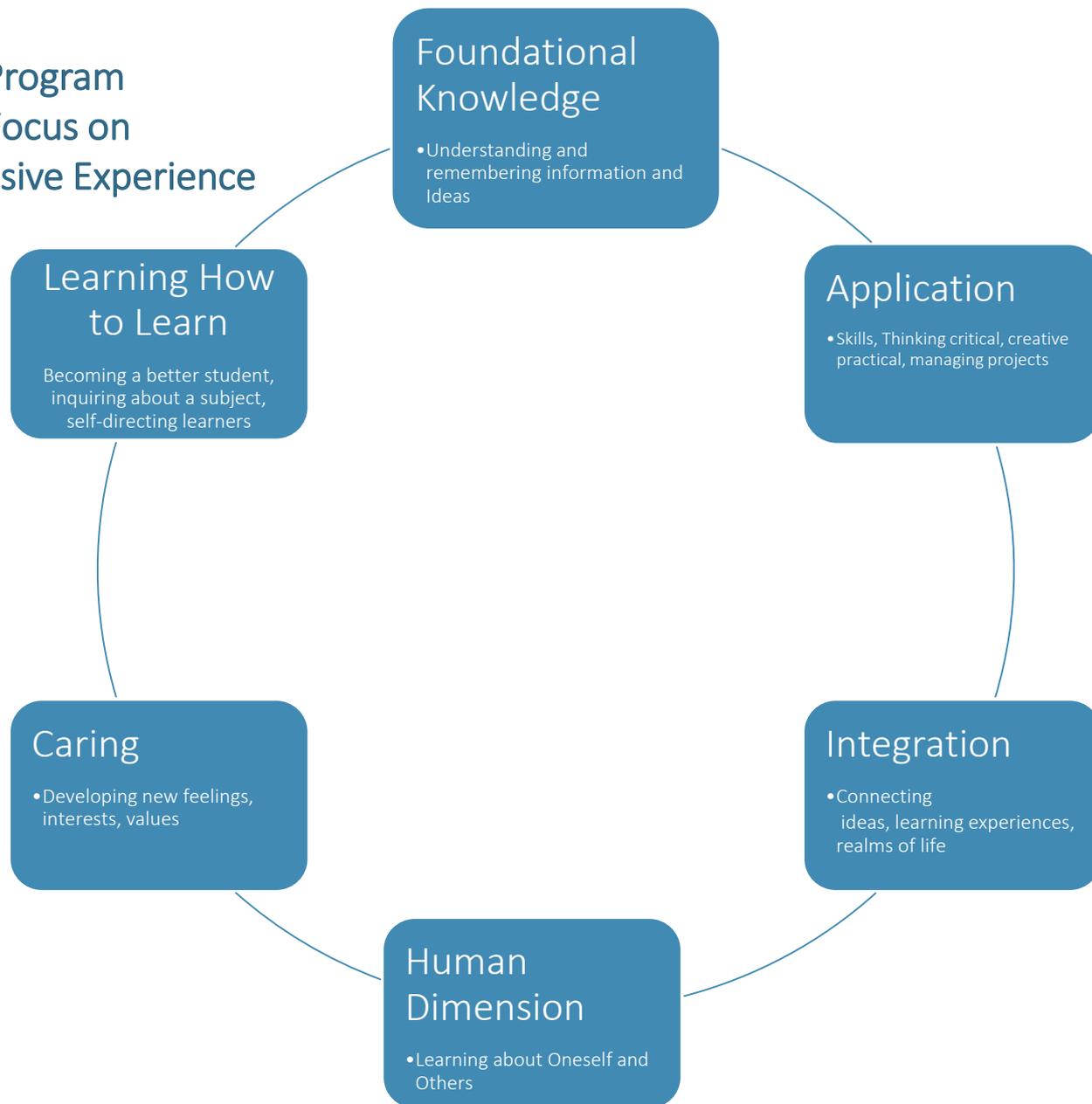
Creativity: The capability to put together what one has learned in a new, original way.

Example: “Design and conduct a research study.”

* From Suskie (2009), pp. 120-121



View Two: Program Outcomes Focus on Comprehensive Experience



Significant Learning: Examples

World Regional Geography

Foundational Knowledge: Understand major geographic concepts – physical, geography, human geography, scale, demographic transition, and so on.

Application: Be able to find information on and analyze regional problems from a geographic perspective.

Integration: Identify the interactions between geography and other realms of knowledge such as history, politics, economics, and social structure.

Fink (2013) pp. 39-40



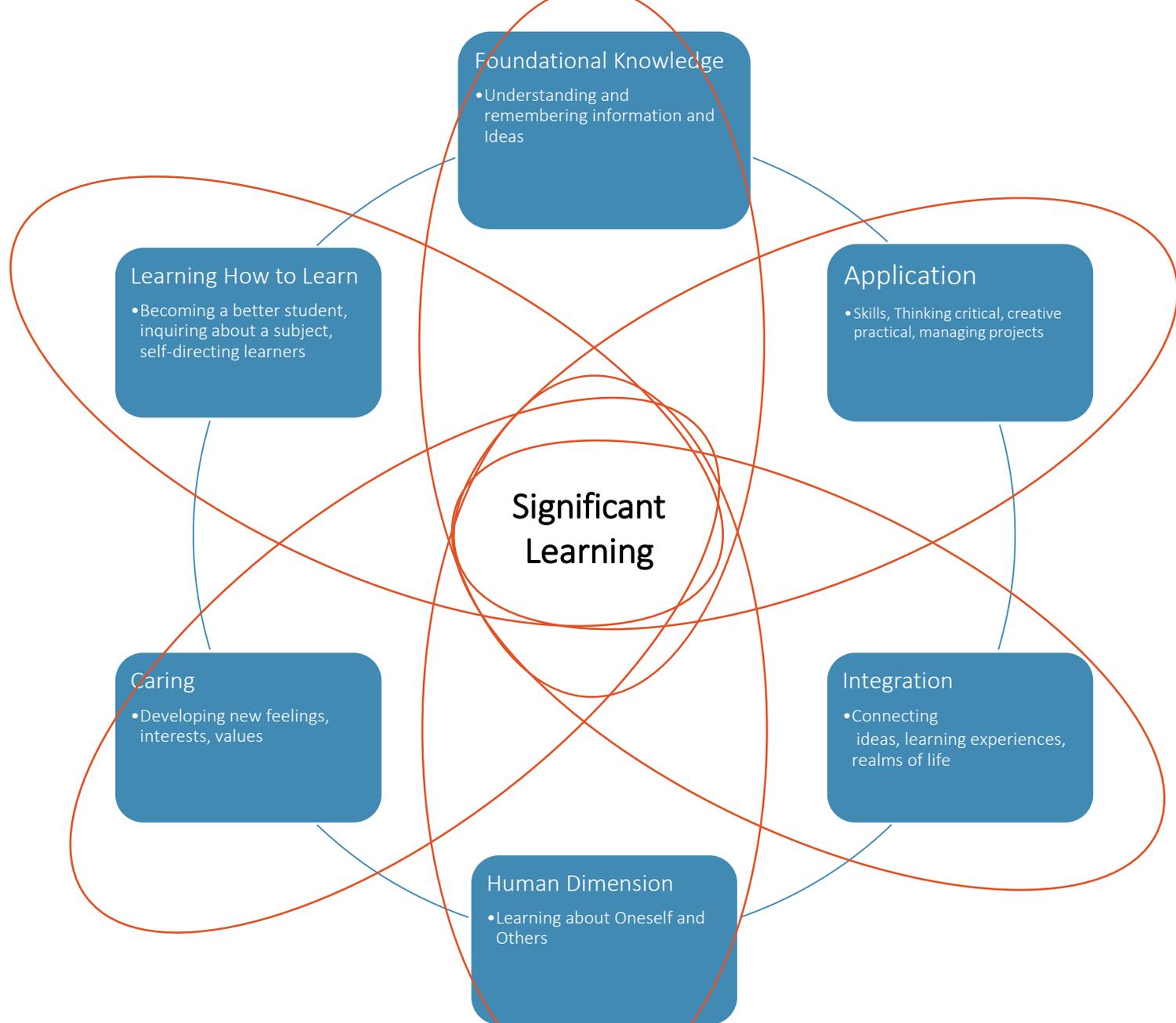
Example (cont)

Human Dimension: Be able to identify ways in which one's personal life affects and is affected by interactions with other world regions.

Caring: Be interested in other places of the world and want to continue learning about those places via reading, TV, the Internet, and travel.

Learning How to Learn: Be familiar with a number of popular geography journals and other sources of knowledge about other parts of the world.



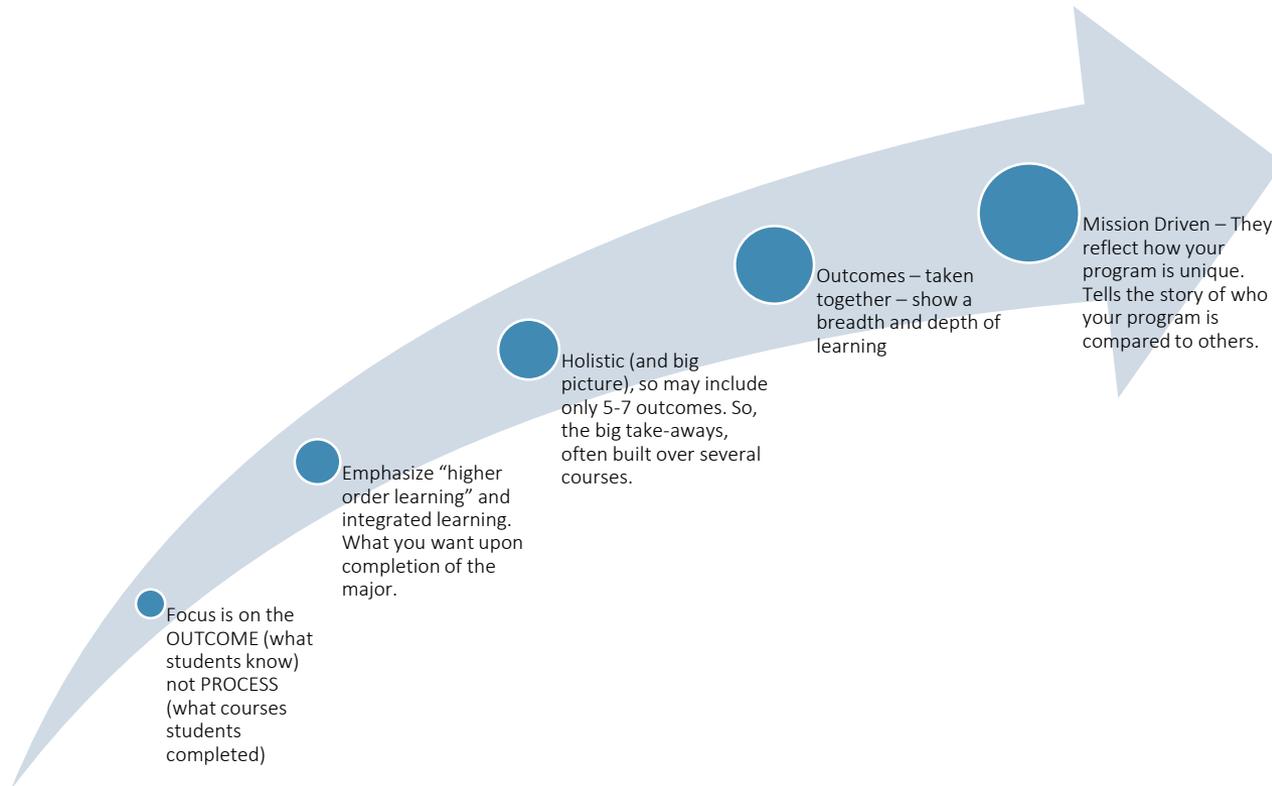


All while focusing on the big picture.....



...and who we are as a university and as a program.

Summarize: Program Outcomes



How do we choose learning outcomes for our program?

Begin by Taking Stock

Working together as a faculty...

Review Requirements: why do you require certain courses.

Look at your curriculum: What do you teach? What do you assess (assignments that you give)? What prerequisites do you have for courses? Why?

External:

Look to field: Review standards in the academic field or in the profession.

Look beyond the classroom: What do employers expect of your graduates?

Overall: What are the most important things a student should know, be able to do (skills), or value after completing your program?

Start with current learning outcomes

If you already have learning outcomes:

- ✓ Are requirements appropriately reflected in the current learning outcomes?
- ✓ Do recent changes to courses or curriculum impact the current learning outcomes?
- ✓ Does your set of learning outcomes cover the full scope of your program, including any skills and values that you teach or instill?
- ✓ Did you check for appropriate levels or expectations for student learning?
- ✓ Do your learning outcomes incorporate what is going on in the field, profession?
- ✓ Have you considered how your learning outcomes align with competencies needed in occupations or in preparation for graduate school?
- ✓ Do your learning outcomes reflect who you are as a program? AU's unique goals and values?
- ✓ Check for relevance – Are they meaningful to students?

Gather information into 4-7 Themes

- Organize the information you've gathered by themes. What do you see in common? What seems to be an outlier?
- Which themes are the most important? The most central to your program? *(These will be the foundation of your learning outcomes!)*
- Which themes are groundbreaking or new? An area perhaps that you don't really focus on in your teaching? *(These can be the foundation of changes in your curriculum.)*



From Themes to Words: Articulating Learning Outcomes?



Some Nuts and Bolts: Action Verbs

Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define• Recognize• Reproduce• Tell	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain• Summarize• Classify• Illustrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apply• Execute• Practice• Demonstrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze• Appraise• Compare• Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compose• Construct• Organize• Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess• Critique• Evaluate• Judge

Aim for Outcomes that Are Clear but not too Specific

For example:

Students will demonstrate information literacy skills. (Too vague)

Students will be able to use the university's databases to retrieve information. (Too specific)

Students will be able to locate information and evaluate it critically for its validity and appropriateness. (Better)

From: Suskie (2009). p. 130

Other tips

Write for students (no technical language)

Write them in ways that make them measurable/assessable.



Examples of Effectively Expressed Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

Design an experiment to test a chemical hypothesis or theory. (chemistry)

Present original interpretations of literary works in the context of existing research on these works. (literature)

Use gender as an analytical category to critique cultural and social institutions. (women's studies)

From: Suskie (2009). p. 132



An Example from Carnegie Mellon's Graduate Economics Program

Graduates of the program should be able to:

Identify, explain, and use economic concepts, theories, models, and data-analytic techniques.

Use knowledge and skills of economics, mathematics, statistics, and computing flexibly in a variety of contexts.

Apply economic tools to formulate positions on a wide range of social and economic problems and engage effectively in policy debates.

Use investigative skills necessary for conducting original economic research and participating effectively in project team.

Deliver effective presentations in which they combine visual communication design with oral arguments and/or written word.

Next Steps?

Review Learning Outcomes already posted on TracDat (AU's assessment software site) if there.

<http://american.tracdat.com>

Put learning outcomes on the next department faculty meeting agenda.

- Assign faculty to help with each aspect of the “taking stock” part of learning outcome formulation
- Set a time for faculty to come together to agree on the main themes and to determine process for articulating learning outcomes
- Update TracDat with your new Learning Outcomes.
 - Archive Old Learning Outcomes

Resources?

<http://www.American.edu/provost/oira>

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